

HEPATITIS A

General Information



Who is at risk?

Although anyone can get hepatitis A, some people are at greater risk, such as those who:

- Travel to or live in countries where hepatitis A is common
- Have sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis A
- Are men who have sexual contact with other men
- Use certain illegal drugs, whether injected or not
- Have clotting-factor disorders, such as hemophilia
- Are household members or caregivers of a person infected with hepatitis A

What is hepatitis?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis is most often caused by one of several viruses, such as hepatitis A virus, hepatitis B virus, or hepatitis C virus. Toxins, certain drugs, some diseases, heavy alcohol use, bacterial infections, and viral infections can also cause hepatitis.

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the hepatitis A virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months.

How common is hepatitis A in the United States?

Hepatitis A still occurs in the United States, although not as frequently as it once did. During the last 20 years, the number of cases of hepatitis A has steadily declined. The estimated 373,000 new infections in 1990 dropped to 143,000 by the year 2000. New cases are now estimated to be around 30,000 each year. Many experts believe this decline is a result of the vaccination of children and people at risk for hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A can be prevented with a safe and effective vaccine.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is usually spread when a person ingests fecal matter — even in microscopic amounts — from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the feces or stool from an infected person.

It can be spread when:

- An infected person does not wash his/her hands properly after going to the bathroom and then touches objects or food
- A caregiver does not properly wash his or her hands after changing diapers or cleaning up the stool of an infected person
- Someone engages in certain sexual activities, such as oral-anal contact with an infected person

Hepatitis A can also be spread through contaminated food or water. This most often occurs in countries where hepatitis A is common, especially if sanitary conditions or personal hygiene are poor. Contamination of food can happen at any point: growing, harvesting, processing, handling, and even after cooking.





Who should get vaccinated against hepatitis A?

- Men who have sexual contact with other men
- Users of injection and non injection illegal drugs
- People with chronic or long term liver disease, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common
- People with clotting-factor disorders
- People who work with hepatitis A virus in a research laboratory or with animals infected with the virus
- Family and caregivers planning an adoption from a country where hepatitis A is common
- All children at age 1 year

For more information

Talk to your health professional, call your health department, or visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Not everyone gets symptoms. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after exposure and can include:

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| ■ Fever | ■ Nausea | ■ Clay-colored bowel movements |
| ■ Fatigue | ■ Vomiting | ■ Joint pain |
| ■ Loss of appetite | ■ Abdominal pain | ■ Jaundice |
| | ■ Dark urine | |

Symptoms are more likely to occur in adults than children. They usually last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill for as long as 6 months.

How is hepatitis A diagnosed and treated?

A doctor can determine if a person has hepatitis A by discussing his or her symptoms and taking a blood sample. There are no special treatments for hepatitis A. Doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids, although a few people will need to be hospitalized. It can take a few months before people begin to feel better.

People can spread hepatitis A even if they don't look or feel sick. Some adults and many children have no symptoms.

How serious is hepatitis A?

Most people who get hepatitis A feel sick for several months, but they usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage. Sometimes hepatitis A can cause liver failure and death, although this is rare and occurs more commonly in people older than 50 and people with other liver diseases.

Can hepatitis A be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent hepatitis A is by getting vaccinated. Experts recommend the vaccine for all children, some international travelers, and people with certain risk factors and medical conditions. The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective and given as 2 shots, 6 months apart. Both shots are needed for long-term protection. Frequent handwashing with soap and water — particularly after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing or eating food — also helps prevent the spread of hepatitis A.

Once a person recovers from hepatitis A, he or she cannot get it again or spread it to others. For these individuals, the vaccine offers no benefit since they have already been infected.



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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Division of Viral Hepatitis



www.cdc.gov/hepatitis